

Church Membership

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Local churches lose many people

- **Droppers** ditch church completely.
- **Hoppers** switch churches often.

Why droppers ditch

- Too busy for church
- Sleep, lawn and car care
- Shopping, sports
- Feel out of place
- Wounded, angry about something
- Guilt or embarrassment
- Spirituality, not organized religion
- Not believing Christian teaching

Why hoppers switch

- Projectors in church are evil.
- I don't feel the Holy Spirit in the music.
- My idea for a building was ignored.
- Drama program was better elsewhere.
- We want Sunday school.
- Sports program mistreated our kid.
- Our son was turned down by a girl.
- A leader's kids cut in line at potlucks.
- A boy was too rough with our son.

Why hoppers switch

- People know about my drunk driving.
- Some people dress too immodestly.
- Church budget was voted on too soon.
- Another church is more alive.
- I get mad just seeing that person.
- The church stopped giving me money.
- The pastor reminds me of my father.
- Sermons are too long and too boring.
- We want verse-by-verse teaching.

Circulation of the saints

- It has become common for people to “attend” a church but not join as committed members (much as “living together” without a marriage commitment has become common).
- It has become common for people to join a church, but then leave and join another, and then leave and join another (much as serial divorce has become common).

Why stick with church?

If there's no solid reason to stay, then almost any reason is enough to leave.

- Church is Christ's **bride**. Will a man be your friend if you reject his wife?
- Church is **building** founded on Christ. You can't stand on a foundation without being part of the structure.
- Church is Christ's **body**. Outside the body, you can't connect to the head.

Simple Church

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

- Apostles' teaching
- Fellowship
- Breaking of bread
- Prayers

Why stick with a particular church?

- **Vision:** A healthy church centers on God and shapes disciples to grow more like Christ. This vision not a quick fix but a long pursuit of maturity in Christ.
- **Love:** Fellow members of this body are increasingly dear to you, and you to them. We are committed to each other.

Maturity in unity

Eph 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Authority equips for maturity

Eph 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Maturity involves stability

Eph 4:14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Children are easily excited, easily bored, easily upset, easily fooled. Grownups are slower to change their mood or their mind.

Speaking truth in love unifies and grows us up in Christ

Eph 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Opportunities to beat Satan

Eph 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil... 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Opportunities to live by the Spirit and display' grace

Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Discipleship vs. Evangelism?

The way to get as many people into heaven as you can is to get heaven into as many people as you can—that is, to follow the path of genuine spiritual transformation or full-throttle discipleship to Jesus Christ. When we are counting up results we also need to keep in mind the multitudes of people who will *not* be in heaven because they have never ... seen the reality of Christ in a living human being. (Dallas Willard)

Growing up as Christ's Body

- Don't be a dropper/ditcher.
- Don't be a hopper/switcher.
- Don't expect a perfect church (yet).
- Do expect and commit to a church with a vision for new birth leading to maturity in Christ, where God's truth is spoken and God's love is shown.